

REPORT OF THE  
PASSAIC COUNTY LEGAL AID SOCIETY - 1967

The Passaic County Legal Aid Society has been in full operation for the calendar year 1967. The central offices are located at #5 Colt Street in the City of Paterson. There is a full-time, fully staffed office located at #322 Passaic Street, Passaic, a part-time, up-county rural office located at #744 Ringwood Avenue, Wanaque, and three part-time neighborhood offices in the City of Paterson, located at #55 North Main Street, #17 Bridge Street and #300 Grand Street.

The staff of the organization consists of Albert L. Levy, Esq., Director, Jane B. Cordo, attorney-at-law, Deputy Director, and 7 staff attorneys, as follows: Howard B. Kagan, Harold Hoffman, Jacob L. Safron, Robert G. Mazeau, Thomas M. Marquet, Lawrence B. Dvoretzky, and Robert G. Bressler, who resigned as of December 15, 1967.

Mr. Hoffman is responsible for the up-county area. During the past year he has worked closely with Thomas Gregory, Director of the Passaic County Community Action Council, which covers the vast area of Ringwood, Wanaque, West Milford, Newfoundland, etc.

The target community in this area is almost

completely made up of the citizens living in the old mine area of Ringwood. These people do not find it easy to accept the "interference" of the "outside world".

It is to be noted that the problems of these people are not too different from the problems of the poverty community located in any other part of Passaic County. The approach in solving their problems and in assisting these people must, of necessity, take a different form. Mr. Hoffman has been able to relate and extend the helping hand of the Society into this rural area because of his ability to totally comprehend the difficulty experienced by some people in communicating their true feelings and innermost thoughts.

The strides that have been made in this particular area during the past year are almost immeasurable. The Society is firmly entrenched in the minds of the inhabitants of this target community and the confidence they have in our determination to be of assistance is firmly reflected by their day to day willingness to ask for our assistance.

To an outsider who is not completely familiar with the workings and day to day living of this community, it might seem that our accomplishments

here have been almost infinitesimal, but to those who are familiar with life in this area, one would have to agree that our steps have been, indeed, "giant steps".

The full-time office in the City of Passaic was manned by Mr. Howard B. Kagan since its opening day, December 15, 1966, and throughout 1967. His progress in this large city is equivalent to the progress made by the Paterson office.

As the attorney in charge, he has been accused of "harassing" the City Welfare Director, has "stepped on many toes", and has actually compelled those in authority to comply with the latter and spirit of the law.

Although this may seem insignificant in that the letter of the law must be obeyed, we would, indeed, be "Pollyannas" not to recognize abuses, no matter how minor, that over the years become so firmly entrenched that they become a part of the normal procedure followed by local administrative officials.

It has never been the intention of the Society to harass anyone, nor to "step on toes". However, one of the primary reasons for the creation of a Legal Services Project is to assist indigents and members of the target community in

recognizing their rights as American citizens.

One other area of accomplishment in this particular office was the realization of a large segment of the poverty community that consumer credit was available to them from the average middle class responsible merchants and there was no need for them to resort, for the purchase of household appliances and similar items, to the unscrupulous merchant who seeks only to exploit rather than serve the public.

The three neighborhood offices in the City of Paterson are manned by Mr. Jacob Safron, Mr. Lawrence Dvores and Mr. Robert Mazeau.

The Grand Street office is located in the heart of a predominately Spanish speaking neighborhood.

Mr. Dvores, assisted by Mr. Ralph Soria, our most able Spanish speaking aide, has developed an excellent relationship with the community as a whole. The primary difficulty of the language barrier has been overcome and the relationships here have developed accordingly.

The 55 North Main Street office is the responsibility of Mr. Jacob Safron. This neighborhood office services the area known as the Christopher Columbus Housing Development the "over the river

area". The response to our efforts in this section has not been as successful as we had anticipated but the primary problems of relating to the community and developing a good rapport with this target area increases day by day.

17 Bridge Street was manned by Mr. Martin Sarver who resigned in September of 1967. Mr. Robert Mazeau is the staff attorney in charge at the present time.

It should be remembered that this area gave us our police brutality case which was disposed of in the Municipal Court. The neighborhood council offices are to be congratulated for the excellent investigative services that they rendered in this case. Unfortunately, Judge Kushner's decision was not completely favorable.

5 Colt Street is the central office of the Society and is manned by the Director and Deputy Director and all the Staff Attorneys when they are not in the neighborhood offices.

A 24 hour answering service is available to all who request service after office hours or on weekends. A rotating system is used to provide at least one staff attorney who is available at all times. The Director and Deputy Director are available upon request.

The past year has established the need for this 24 hour service and it shall be continued in the future.

During the summer our attorneys were made available to the office of the Public Defender to assist its offices in providing legal services for the indigent persons arrested during the riots. Miss Cordo served in this capacity for 18 continuous beginning 3:30 Saturday afternoon, July 15th.

The rest of the staff assisted by giving counsel to the indigent in the county jail of Elizabeth and Jersey City. The Paterson area was covered by Mr. Levy, the attorneys and the law clerks, in the county jail and before the Magistrate.

Our plans for 1968 are quite enthusiastic. A full-time, fully staffed office shall be set up at 17 Bridge Street, in the City of Paterson. This service is the culmination of a long range program of decentralization to better service the target community. It is our intention to create three full-time neighborhood offices in the City of Paterson. The sites for the other two offices have not as yet been confirmed but it is expected that the creation of these offices

would provide total services for the Spanish speaking community and also to include the Alexander Hamilton area.

We are also developing a new training program for our aides. It is our intention that the aides shall be thoroughly trained in the area of outreach into the community so that closer "family ties" will be established. This will make the community aware of our service and our staff aware of the community and its problems.